

MONTANA REACTS TO WARMING

By IR Staff

Recommendations of a special panel's two-year effort to figure out ways to cut state energy consumption and thus do Montana's part in reducing the emission of greenhouse gases were proudly unveiled by Gov. Brian Schweitzer last week.

The report discussed 54 specific ideas ranging from requiring utilities to include more renewable energy sources to increasing the production of crops that can be converted to biodiesel fuels. But the bottom line, at least for state government and the university system, was to cut energy use by 20 percent by 2010. The plan, said Schweitzer, is for the state to lead by example.

The governor recognized that some ideas may be more effective — and perhaps more possible — than others. Still, it is an important initiative, particularly in light of this year's hardening scientific consensus that current global warming is indeed human caused.

That doesn't mean the hoots from disbelievers are going to go away. Disparagement of global warming has become an integral part of the ideological passions of many, a direct consequence of a purposeful political agenda, and just as the tobacco industry campaigned for so many years to muddy the scientific consensus about the dangers of smoking, so will disbelievers continue to deny the global warming consensus.

That consensus crystallized last February with the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that said global warming was "unequivocal" and human causes were almost certainly to blame. (The scientists figured the probability at 90 percent.) It was that report which recently won those scientists half a Nobel Prize.

Arguments that there really isn't a consensus are so much hot air, so to speak. A recent report in the journal *Science* discussed an analysis of the 928 abstracts on climate change published in refereed scientific journals between 1993 and 2003. About 75 percent of them either explicitly or implicitly accepted the consensus view, while 25 percent were about paleoclimate studies and did not address current warming. Not one of the 928 disagreed with the consensus position, a rather remarkable finding.

Many people like to point to the numerous, and often extreme, instances of climate change in the earth's history, using such changes to contend that current warming is nothing new. Such an argument has no bearing on the current situation, not only because in the earlier instances there were no people around to cause and to be hurt by such a change, but also because the natural causes of past changes are increasingly well understood.

For example, the physics of climate change clearly explains the “little ice age” between the 15th and 19th centuries. Moreover, that physics shows that the “little ice age” should have continued the cooling into the 20th century, but certainly not caused the warming now being seen. If you don’t accept that greenhouse gases from human activities since the industrial revolution turned the climate around, then you’re reduced to magical thinking about what did.

As is so often the case, California has led the states in reacting to climate change. We’re glad to see Montana is following suit. Nothing is ever 100 percent certain in science, and the current scientific consensus may turn out to be wrong. But to willfully ignore its latest projections would not be forgiven by those who follow us.